

Rhode Island State Police Getting Tough on Drunk Drivers

If you're driving the highways of Rhode Island, you're likely to see Rhode Island State Police out in force, enforcing the traffic and criminal laws of our State. With the January graduation of 34 new troopers, the State Police is producing impressive numbers of traffic citations and DUI arrests.

In a comparison of the first five months of 2004 versus 2005, DUI arrests more than doubled. Similarly, the number of traffic summonses written increased over 14 percent. What does this mean for you, the citizen? If you're breaking the law, you're more likely to get caught.

In recent years, Rhode Island has seen a trend towards more drunk driving deaths. Since 2002, the number of fatal traffic crashes involving alcohol has increased by 24 percent. Considering that national statistics decreased by 3 percent in the same time interval, this is disturbing. We believe that this is explained by a combination of weak DUI laws in Rhode Island, and general public disregard for both the law and the health and safety of others travelling on the roadways.

Think about the potential consequences if you're drinking at a party or special event. Don't risk it - if you plan to drive, don't drink. Plan ahead and avoid a tragedy:

- *Choose a sober designated driver before partying*
- *Take a bus, a taxi or ask a friend to drive you home*
- *Spend the night where the activity is being held*

Always wear your safety belt; it is your best defense against an impaired driver. Seatbelt and child restraint use is the law in Rhode Island. However in the fatal crashes in 2003 (the most recent year for which we have complete data), 66 percent of the fatally injured persons were completely unrestrained. Had those people been wearing their seatbelt, chances are they'd be alive today. Don't be the next statistic. The toughest part of our job as law enforcement officers is to notify next of kin of the death of a loved one. Unfortunately it is often the unnecessary consequence of drunk driving and/or failing to wear a seatbelt.

*Should you encounter a suspected drunk driver, dial 911 or *77 on your cellular phone. You will be connected with the closest State Police barracks. Keep a safe distance between your vehicle and the suspect. You will be given instructions by the trooper who takes your call.*